

FEBRUARY 23 RENEWABLE ENERGY PROGRAM

Eleven LWVCC members and two local energy professionals attended the Feb. 23 meeting on Renewable Energy at the Buena Vista Community Center. The attendance was lower than expected because of snowy weather.

Paul Erickson, CEO of Sangre de Cristo Electric Association (SDCEA) provided background information on the association as well as renewable energy and legislative issues. SDCEA is a member-owned cooperative that provides electricity to 12,000 members in five sparsely populated counties in central Colorado, including northern Chaffee County. There is no industrial load. Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, serving 1.5 million customers, is the co-op that provides wholesale electricity to SDCEA and 44 other member co-ops in Colorado, New Mexico, Wyoming and Nebraska. Tri-State's renewable capacity is currently 23 percent (15 percent of its energy generation is currently from renewable resources. Tri-State and San Isabel Electric Co-ops were the WINDexchange wind cooperatives of the year. A new wind farm with twice the capacity of current farms is expected to be on line in 2016 near Burlington, Co.) Excel Energy is the investor-owned electricity provider in a slightly larger area with 3.5 million customers. SDCEA is highly leveraged with 40 employees and purchases all of its electricity and transmitting equipment from Tri-State. If there is a net income, it is credited back to the members. Unclaimed credits provide scholarships for members and their families.

The energy installer commented that SDCEA was always easy to work with compared to other companies. Erickson wanted feedback if that was not the case. SDCEA members are encouraged to suggest improvements and attend annual meetings and vote on board members. SDCEA will celebrate its 75th Anniversary at its annual meeting June 16 at the Chaffee County Fairgrounds.

SB 13-252 increased the renewable energy standard (RES) from 10 percent in 2015 to 20 percent in 2020. Erickson supports the RES but feels the stipulation that at least 1 percent be distributed generation like rooftop solar is too difficult for most co-ops to reach. He supports SB 15-046, which would decrease the cost of the RES by allowing purchases of electricity from community solar gardens to qualify as retail distributed generation with the multiplier of three. He feels that rooftop solar installers were favored in the original bill. He also supports HB 15-1118 that would allow large-scale hydroelectricity and stored hydroelectricity to meet the RES. However, this bill is currently tabled. He opposed SB 15-044 that would have halved the RES for both co-ops and investor-owned Excel that did not pass the House. State Senator Kerry Donovan is initiating stakeholder meetings on SB 15-046. The Colorado League of Women Voters opposes all three bills.

SDCEA leads the co-ops in distributed generation, having met the 2020 standard already. There are 167 PV solar, 20 wind and three small hydropower generations. Hydropower has the highest capacity and total generation since it is around the clock. Smart metering will be coming in the future.

Bill Bennett, energy use advisor, briefly discussed net metering, which is available to customer-generators where part or all of the electrical requirements of the customer is supplied by solar, wind, biomass or hydropower generating facility. The system is located on and controlled by the customer-generator, and it is inspected and connected in parallel to the local distribution of the co-op. The net meter measures the flow of electricity in both directions. The member's meter cost includes inspection of the system. The co-op will bill the customer for net electricity for the billing period. If the electricity generated by the

customer exceeds that supplied by the co-op, the excess is banked and carried forward to be refunded at the wholesale rate.

Bennett also strongly feels solar hot water is more cost effective than solar electricity because of the low temperature of intake water and abundant sunshine in Colorado. Federal tax credits of 30 percent of cost are still available through 2016 for solar hot water and solar photovoltaic panels. Hot water is a way of storing some solar energy. There are no known solar leasing companies providing services in SDCEA service area because providers prefer to maximize their profits where kWh charges are the highest.

He showed no change from 1982 to 2013 of annual residential kWh usage for SDCEA of 8,000 kWh for year-round residents and about 6,400 for year-round and seasonal residents together. The average annual kWh for Colorado in 2012 was 8,472. In spite of marked improvements in energy efficiency, homes, especially seasonal, have grown larger, and more energy-consuming devices are used in the home. The peak load tends to be 6-9 p.m. in the winter here instead of 4-6 p.m. in the summer in most other areas because few residences have central air conditioning. About 40 percent of residents are seasonal in SDCEA service area.

Linda Nyberg, communications and marketing specialist for SDCEA, briefly presented the Energy-Star Appliance and efficient lighting rebates. Members can find out more details at www.myelectriccoop.com.